

VZCZCXRO2541
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSL #0148/01 0861658
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 271658Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2408
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BRATISLAVA 000148

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: GASPAREVIC AND FRIENDS PLAY THE NATIONALIST CARD

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 143

[1](#)B. BRATISLAVA 115

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i., Eddins for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Introduction and Summary. After opposition candidate Iveta Radicova's better-than-expected showing in the first round of Slovak presidential elections March 21 (ref A), incumbent President Gasparovic and his supporters wasted no time playing the nationalist (read: anti-Hungarian) card in an effort to discredit and undermine Radicova's campaign. Their message, as bluntly put by members of the Slovak National Party (SNS), is that "Hungarians and rich Bratislavans" shouldn't be allowed to elect the next Slovak president.

[1](#)2. (SBU) While such a notion will certainly resonate with some voters, this offensive tactic could spur the 500,000 strong ethnic Hungarian minority to turn out in much higher numbers for the run-off on April 4. Regardless of the outcome -- and Gasparovic remains favored -- the rapidity and ease with which Prime Minister Fico and SNS leaders have played the Hungarian card is deeply troubling. It is also indicative of the level of concern among Gasparovic's supporters that he could actually lose the race. End Introduction and Summary.

"No one has done more for Slovak-Hungarian relations than I"

[1](#)3. (SBU) So said Slovak President Gasparovic during a recent televised presidential debate. Given Gasparovic's seeming subservience to the SNS agenda (e.g., his veto of compromise legislation on the use of Hungarian place names in Slovak textbooks and his consistent expressions of support for the substance -- if not the style -- of Jan Slota's anti-Hungarian rhetoric), his claim is dubious, at best. Ethnic Hungarian voters are not in accord with Gasparovic's self-assessment. According to polls taken between July 2008 and December 2008, Gasparovic's support among Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) voters declined significantly, from 32 percent to 18 percent. And that number is likely much less today, following Gasparovic's subsequent approach to the textbook law and his comments during the campaign.

[1](#)4. (U) What really put the lie to Gasparovic's rhetoric, however, was the launch this week of an obviously well-orchestrated campaign by Gasparovic's supporters to convince Slovak voters that the state is at risk of being hijacked by Hungarian-speakers in southern Slovakia. Gasparovic's surrogates have played their parts to a tee. In the case of the Prime Minister, there was no inflammatory rhetoric about the voting patterns of ethnic Hungarians. Instead, Fico chose to highlight the alleged inroads of a Hungarian extremist organization called the "64 Counties Movement" (the name comes from the number of counties in Hungary prior to the 1918 Treaty of Trianon) into Slovakia.

15. (U) Following an "extraordinary" session of the Slovak Security Council on March 23, Fico convened an urgent press conference in which he briefed reporters on supposed recruitment activities of a Hungarian extremist group in several Hungarian-dominated Slovak cities. Fico blamed the increase in and export of Hungarian extremism on Hungary's internal political and economic challenges. He said "...we consider it absolutely unacceptable and inadmissible, when Hungarian extremist forces seek supporters in Slovakia." He added that the Slovak police are monitoring the situation and would strongly and resolutely intervene if the Hungarian group violated Slovak laws. In a surprising display of candor, SNS Deputy Chairwoman Anna Belousovova acknowledged to the press that these concerns had been brought to the fore now in an effort to derail Radicova's campaign.

16. (U) While the timing of this grim announcement was hardly subtle, it paled in comparison to the rhetoric of SNS MPs Jan Slota, Rudolf Pucik (chairman of the Slovak parliament's defense committee), and Belousovova. In various fora they argued that the fact that Radicova received approximately 80 percent of the ethnic Hungarian vote posed a real threat to Slovakia. Belousovova promised that the SNS -- a member of the governing coalition -- would not allow the fate of the country to be determined by "Hungarians and rich Bratislavans," adding that the party is convening an "extraordinary" conference to discuss its response to the threat. Slota stated that "we are concerned over and regret

BRATISLAVA 00000148 002 OF 003

the fact that Iveta Radicova gained many votes of ethnic Hungarian citizens living in southern Slovakia," begging the question of just who those ethnic Hungarians were supposed to have supported instead.

Belousovova on the Warpath

17. (U) Deputy Prime Minister Caplovic, whose portfolio includes human rights and minorities, chimed in by asserting that "Ms. Radicova would advocate the interests of nationalist powers of the Hungarian minority." Erstwhile SDKU member and defeated presidential candidate Zuzana Martinakova, while declining to endorse either Gasparovic or Radicova, claimed she was "worried" about the high number of votes cast by the ethnic Hungarian minority for Radicova. Some Slovak commentators have tartly suggested that both Martinakova and her husband, Marian Bednar (Gasparovic's former domestic policy advisor) are in line for plum jobs if Gasparovic wins reelection.

18. (SBU) It seems, however, that SNS's Belousovova has been assigned a particularly prominent role in the nationalist campaign against Radicova. In addition to her comments regarding Hungarians and rich Bratislavans, she has latched on to Radicova's support in the early 1990s for a civic group that, in effect, supported a common Czechoslovak state. Radicova has responded that at the time of her association with the group, no political party but SNS advocated the split-up of Czechoslovakia. As Belousovova frames it, "Radicova was one of those who considered the formation of Slovakia to be a threat...An immoral person who lies cannot become president." Fico has also stated that it would be inappropriate for someone who did not support the founding of the Slovak state to become its president.

19. (C) Although Belousovova frequently takes the lead in various SNS crusades -- because she is much more presentable in public than the bloated (and often drunken) Slota -- it is likely that she has been cast in this particular attack role because Fico and Gasparovic are concerned that sustained attacks on Radicova by male politicians could backfire.

"A handful of skinheads..."

¶10. (U) As a respected Slovak commentator who closely follows Slovak-Hungarian relations sharply noted: "Hungarian extremists have no partner more rewarding than our Prime Minister. Who else would respond to their semi-clandestine events by convening the state's Security Council and raising a handful of skinheads to a major problem in the relations of two neighboring states? Fico knows what he is doing though: he is trying to keep the servile president in his post at any cost and so protect his own prestige ... He is trying to achieve this by mobilizing the time-honored imaginary Hungarian threat ... Shortly before Fico raised the (perceived) Hungarian threat to the main issue of the campaign, the Foreign Minister handed out an award promoting Slovak-Hungarian understanding. If anyone had any doubts whether an award from the Slovak Government could be anything more than a farce, Fico dispelled them." (NOTE: To his credit, Slovak Foreign Minister Lajcak used the aforementioned awards ceremony to publicly criticize those who sought to inject the ethnic Hungarian issue into the presidential campaign.)

Comment: A Nasty Synergy

¶11. (C) Although members of the Fico Government have committed a variety of offenses (rhetorical and more grave, as in the infamous case of Hedviga Malinova) against Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian minority, we can hardly recall a more blatantly offensive line than that now being spouted. The base, nationalistic politicking provoked by the fact that Hungarian citizen simply exercised their franchise is more than disappointing, albeit not completely surprising. While it remains to be seen how their fifth-column rhetoric will affect the upcoming vote, it's yet another sign that politics trumps all for this government.

¶12. (C) We have to wonder whether Fico and Co. don't fully understand, or simply don't care, that their actions -- the demonization of Malinova, insults to elected Hungarian leaders and the country's national symbols, and the police action at Dunajska Streda -- are potentially creating fertile ground for real discontent among the Hungarian minority here.

BRATISLAVA 00000148 003 OF 003

By essentially calling into question an ethnic minority group's right to vote, Gasparovic's advocates are stepping perilously close to a line better left uncrossed. Moreover, if the ethnic Hungarian minority responds by turning out in force April 4, the tactic could well backfire on the incumbent President.

EDDINS